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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a graduate seminar designed to provide a multidisciplinary student group with the experience of using a team approach for assessing group family needs, conceptualizing a services and self-support model for meeting those needs, and articulating the model in a grant proposal. A summary of course goals and student requirements is provided along with a description of the campus, student-family housing apartment complex which was the focus of the study. A student-developed schema for problem solving, used throughout the course, is presented as well as a detailed description of the seminar in process. Student learnings are summarized and a brief reference list is appended. (MCF)

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DEVELOPING MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAMS TO ASSESS FAMILY NEEDS AND ENVISION SERVICES

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DEVELOPING MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAMS TO ASSESS FAMILY NEEDS AND ENVISION SERVICES

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The value of the interdisciplinary approach to problem solving is expressed by many, but is infrequently accomplished.

A graduate seminar with a selective interdisciplinary mix of students conceptualized a model to address needs of an intercultural and international student housing complex on campus. I guided this small group of students through the maze of problem solving steps while helping them to understand the differences of their respective disciplines and the different perspectives of the many campus offices whose cooperation and assistance were vital to the project. This paper is the story and evaluations of our experiences.

The germ for the idea of this course began when two gentlemen graduate students entered my office to ask for an assist with child care services for the Allerton apartment complex, a student family housing area on campus. As students in a graduate counselling class they had helped survey the apartments and believed the need for child care should be addressed and somehow thought we might be able to arrange to provide such services.

Accustomed to Home Economics being viewed from a limited perspective, I queried about the nature of the larger concerns of the housing complex. The young men informed me of the surveyed need for counselling, short courses, and adaptation by varied cultures to the American way of life, including adjustments to food products available in the local grocery stores. As they became aware of the breadth of possibilities, they, too became excited and referred me to a doctoral student who had an assistantship from Personnel and Counselling to conduct programs for the residents. A small apartment had been provided by the campus housing office and had been converted to accommodate small group counselling and programming. A couple of sessions with the graduate assistant, including a tour of the apartments, intrigued our faculty with the possibilities for serving needs far beyond child care.

There existed a problem, however. We had faculty already scheduled for the next semester. Rather than lose such a fine opportunity I tackled the job with the promise of help from the faculty when I would necessarily be absent. Following is the course description:

> A multidisciplinary team of graduate students will experience the entire process of a team approach in assessing group family needs, envisioning a services and self-support model, and articulating the model in the form of a viable grant proposal for funding.
>
> Enrollees will be selected graduate students representing multi-disciplines pertinent to the project. The students will have direct contact with a project in the launching stage; will study pertinent research and literature, including what constitutes the team concept of problem solving; will learn the function of and work with an advisory committee; will plan a model project for a particular set of circumstances; will study, identify and select viable funding sources; and will write a grant proposal.

After I wrote the course description, I contacted departments we had determined might identify graduate students with discipline expertise to complement our efforts. We determined that those departments which did not have student representation but which could add constructively to the project could be involved through faculty serving with the larger Advisory Committee or on an ad hoc consulting basis. The response was supportive and enthusiastic though students at this late date, just prior to Christmas, were not readily available or were blocked into schedules already. The final student group consisted of an architecture student, a special education teacher by background, a nutrition student, a clothing and textiles student with hospital semi-administrative experience, and a child development student. In essence, this was a selected group by word of mouth and individual contacts. All were interviewed before they enrolled.

So that you may keep in mind the individual learnings of students through this ambitious process, let me relate to you some of the things students indicated they learned about the different disciplines and about themselves by the time we finished the semester. They indicated a major learning was the understanding and respect they gained from work with people who approach knowledge and make inquiries differently. It took a while to realize that an architect approaches a problem situation from a different perspective and philosophy than does a home economist or an educator or a business person. With the struggle for a common philosophy came an understanding that their discipline contributions were indeed unique, complementary, and that the sum total of their efforts would be greater than the summation of their individual parts.

The students also struggled with their individual differences in character, personalities, and values. Since they were all team members for a common project, interaction and cooperation were necessary. Personalities and modes of working varied from those who could perceive a long-term process, those who had difficulty in perceiving the entire project but who had confidence in a scheduled approach and time line, to those with uncertainties about the complexity of the project and a compulsion to accomplish everything at once. For example, at the first class session one student stated, "I want to find out if I can work with other people; my jobs have always been on my own or working directly for someone, not in a team effort". At the conclusion of the course she was able to say, "I have learned that I <u>can</u> work with people, but that I prefer relying on myself and my own time schedule". Though the students knew their disciplines, their expertise for this particular project varied considerably. One had had some experience with models for problem solving; one had assisted with some grant writing; none had worked with an advisory committee; one had experience in working with committee projects though nothing comparable to this magnitude; and all were vitally interested in working on a project which would focus on and address a human need. The last item, I believe, was the key which made the seminar work.

Perhaps this is where I should add my own personal philosophies for obtaining and retaining cooperation in this type of interdisciplinary venture. I believe strongly in touching base with all parties one determines have a vested interest in such a project. And if you should determine that a party has been inadvertently overlooked, which happened to us, you correct that immediately with appropriate comments, information and invitations for involvement. As would be true in many

other ventures, a number of offices on campus had responsibilities related to our project; any findings of needs not addressed could culminate in their being perceived as not doing their job adequately. Therefore, articulating the goals of the project and obtaining backing and involvement was essential. I also believe strongly in process. To me, process means approaching issues and communicating in a sensible, methodical, predictable well-thought-out manner which provides credibility and reasonable comfort for those outside the core development of the project, but for whom there is a vested interest. I believe people need to know they will be advised of the progress and consulted at appropriate points in the process with due respect for their respective job responsibilities related to the project. At times that may mean educating while seeking concurrence.

The class began with an overview of the sequential and sometimes concurrent steps for the entire semester. Together we developed a model or schema for problem-solving which is illustrated on the following page. The overall goal was to conceptualize a model to address determined needs of Allerton residents and then to establish processes and procedures to implement the model.

PLANNING SHEET FOR ESTABLISHING GOALS (ULTIMATE OUTCOMES)

BASE INFORMATION

- Study previous survey results
- Observe and study what is now operating at Allerton Apartments
  - With Allerton complex manager
  - With Allerton complex activity programmer
- Visit Research and Sponsored Programs Office
  - Information on grant writing and procedures
  - Location of grant sources
- Determine additional information needed
  - Process for gathering and analysis
  - Action

MODEL DEVELOPMENT

- Determine philosophical goals
- Expand from philosophy to individual components to specific objectives
- Articulate structure of model (diagram, narrative)

GRANT PROPOSAL (1 or 2 chair; split writing responsibilities)

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

- Establish purposes
- Select committee members and contact for agreement to participate
- Organize for action: establish agenda, determine dates, conduct meetings
- Follow-up

EVALUATION AND PUBLISHABLE ARTICLE

Each student accepted primary responsibility for different steps with the understanding they would be involved in all other steps in a helping role under the leadership of one or two of their classmates. Then we spent time gathering all

the information available from a variety of sources: studying previous surveys of the apartment complex residents, touring the apartments and attending programming sessions held for the residents, gaining background information for locating grant sources and for procedures in writing grant proposals, and conducting a survey of the literature at the library.

Prior information had indicated there would be adequate current survey information for any questions we might have. However, we learned this was inaccurate; surveys had been conducted primarily for counselling services, but neglected other types of needs. The team felt handicapped without specific information they desired and so made the time-consuming and tedious decision to conduct their own survey. This necessitated guidance on format, gathering of information procedures, checks for validity and reliability, and approval from the Human Subjects Review Board. These were new processes for these masters-level students and immediately put us behind schedule. The decision to add this step, not anticipated, was a professionally responsible decision. I commended the students for it, knowing full well the additional strain they were adding to an already packed semester.

Preliminary information gathering indicated anticipated problem areas. Contacts were made with other comparable universities across the country for their remedies to similar concerns. The literature was searched for professional articles which might shed additional information. Grant sources were explored in detail which might provide funding for alternative solutions.

When the survey was completed and interpretations compiled, the Advisory Committee met to consider a carefully planned agenda. After much information was shared and many questions answered, the committee collectively and individually offered valuable suggestions for completion of the project and for additional contacts which might prove helpful.

The class then carefully organized the information for proposal writing. Focus needs were identified which might appeal to different funding sources. Segments of writing were prepared which could be pulled or re-written in adapting to specific requests for proposal guidelines. And then because the semester was drawing to a close, the materials were presented in brief to the Foundation Office on campus to seek summer funds for completing and submitting a full proposal. This intent was to hire two of the students who would be available during the summer and some additional help to complete the process of obtaining funding. The Foundation Office was most encouraging but unable on such short notice to obtain such assistance. This effort will be continued during the current year.

As a culminating experience, the students wrote of their experiences in a combined article which will now be polished and submitted for publication under their authorship. They concluded the experience with the conviction they had gained insights about themselves, a new confidence in the unique skills of their respective disciplines, a healthy respect and new understanding for the skills of other disciplines, and a pride in a model plan they were convinced was valid, achievable, and a worthwhile product. One desire still remains: seeing the model funded and in operation. My obligation to them is not yet finished.

RELATED REFERENCES

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